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To the Editors,

While William Kristol is correct in detailing how the Clinton Administration has eroded the readiness and capabilities of our military, I strongly disagree with his assessment that “congressional Republicans have been complicit in the neglect that is sapping American military strength” (“Silence of the Lambs,” Feb. 7). In recent years Republicans have succeeded – often over the vehement opposition of the Clinton Administration – in ensuring that America’s sons and daughters in the armed services have the resources they need to get the job done.

When the Republican Leadership met before the start of the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress, we agreed that bolstering America’s national security was a pressing need demanding immediate action. I am proud to say that the Republican-led Congress came through by providing needed funds for military equipment and enhancing the quality of life for our troops with increased benefits, higher pay, and better housing.

The Clinton Administration’s record number of deployments has strained America’s armed forces to the breaking point. To ease the strain on military members and their families created by this uncertainty, Republicans provided extra funds and benefits to make military service more rewarding. Republicans provided more funds than the Administration requested for a nearly five percent pay raise, salary bonuses, child development and day care centers, troop and family housing, and hospitals. Additionally, we improved military health care by making it more cost effective and more accessible, and we reformed service members’ retirement system by increasing benefits.

With an Administration that continually short-changes the military’s accounts, it has been difficult to provide our armed forces with the equipment and resources they need to operate at even minimal readiness levels. There have been numerous reports of troops not being able to train because of basic equipment shortages of ammunition and night vision devices and our planes not being able to fly because of a lack of spare parts. We appropriated more funds than the President requested for these accounts and will be back this Session to get our troops the resources they need to ensure that our military has the best trained personnel and most advanced equipment in the world.

A sound national security policy must address long-term priorities as well as immediate needs. In an effort to guarantee that our military will always be the most advanced in the world, we provided billions more than the President requested for research and development accounts. This money supports various programs like medical research, missile defense, safer vehicles, and advanced computer technologies. What makes these programs so important is that the

innovations researchers make today will be used in the civilian world tomorrow. Just look at the Internet and all the benefits it has wrought since its origin as the Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) in 1969.

A major victory for all Americans was the passage of a bill to ensure that Americans are protected from ballistic missile attack. Currently, our military does not have a system to defend America from even one ballistic missile fired from a rogue nation. President Clinton may come out and say that he is for missile defense, but his actions tell another story.

The Heritage Foundation points out that "President Bill Clinton has dismantled the robust missile defense program he inherited from the Bush Administration." Clinton terminated and cut funding on numerous missile defense programs that would have had Americans under a protective shield today. He terminated President Bush's Global Protection Against Limited Strikes (GPALS) missile defense deployment plan and the space-based "Brilliant Pebbles" interceptor development program. Additionally, Clinton cut funding for the deployment of missile defense programs in half and left the negotiating table with Russia regarding cooperative efforts to address the missile threat both countries live with by shunning Yeltsin's Global Protection System proposal for cooperation on missile defense. Despite his suspect commitment, congressional Republicans fought for and enacted a bill to deploy a missile defensive system as soon as technologically possible. In the coming year, Republicans are committed to continue testing, fund additional research, and enhance our ability to make a reliable national missile defense a reality.

In the Second Session of the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress the Republican leadership defense agenda will build on the successes of the first session. We will get our troops needed resources for training, improved readiness levels, more quality family housing, and continued research and testing on a national missile defense system and other important priorities. Republicans in Congress will do everything in our power to ensure that America's national security is second to none.

Sincerely,

J.C. Watts, Jr.  
Chairman, House Republican Conference